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The psychological impact of Covid-19 on Allied Health and Healthcare Science Students



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Introduction

There is limited literature about how students who are training to be part of health and social care professions cope the challenges they face during a global pandemic. During the SARS outbreak, students experienced stigmatisation due to working on frontline and had to isolate from family members to reduce risk of infection (Bai et al. 2004). Social isolation measures can negatively impact students physical and mental health (Keller et al. 2020). A study exploring the psychological impact of Covid-19 on Chinese medical students found that 24.9% experienced mild to severe anxiety (Chao et al. 2020).

Peer support and face to face interaction in education improves various clinical skills (Stone et al. 2013). Therefore, online learning can impact on the student's ability to feel confident during placement and as graduates' transition into the workforce. This in turn can have a psychological impact on both the student and newly graduated healthcare professionals.

Aim:

To explore the psychological impact of Covid-19 on the educational experience of allied health and healthcare science students.

Methods

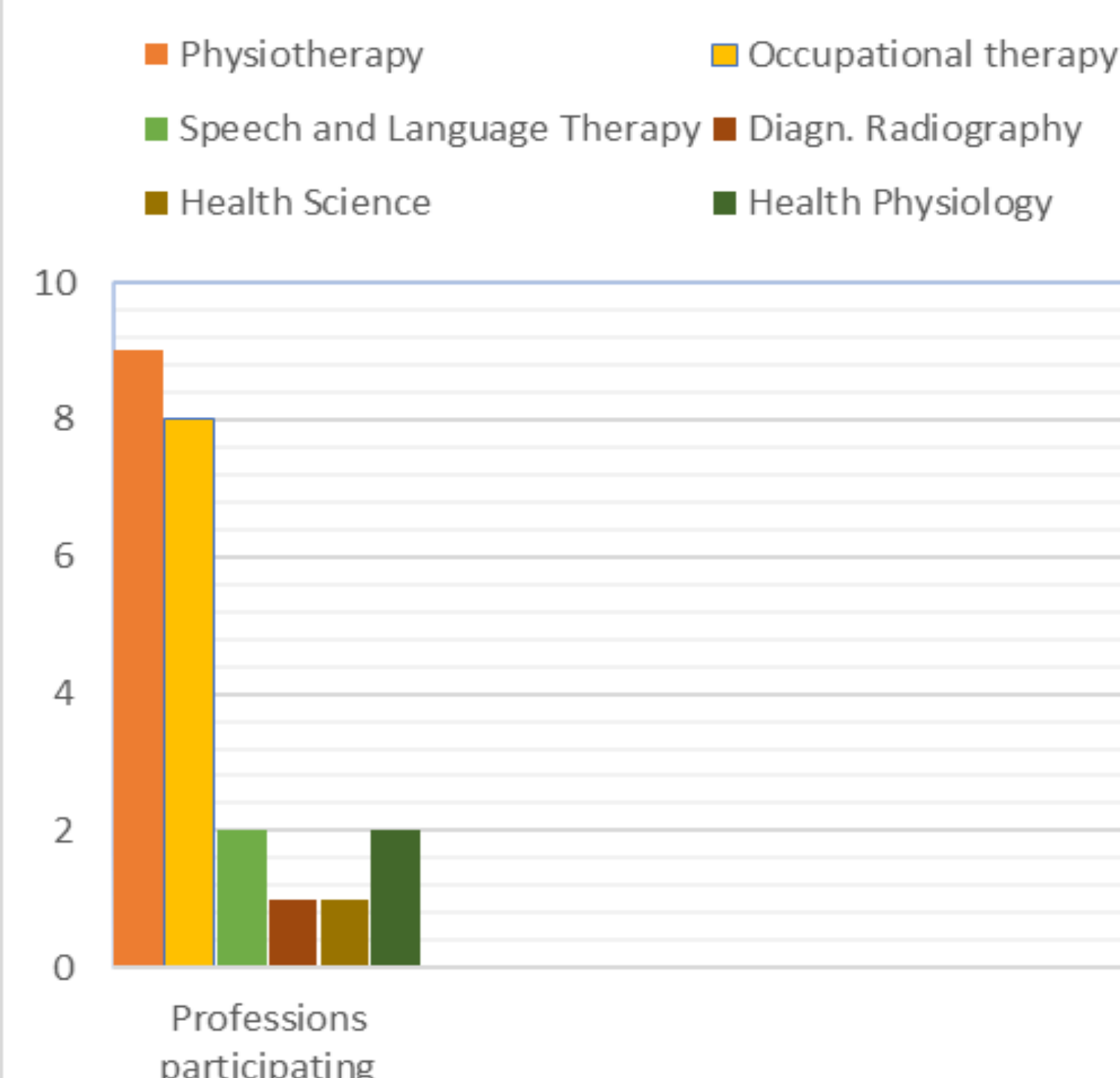
Design:

- Participatory research design including focus groups facilitated by peer researchers
- Peer researchers (PR) were trained final year students
- Data was analysed by two final year placement students and one academic member of staff using thematic analysis. One placement student was also a PR.

Method:

- Six PRs received synchronous and asynchronous training
- Focus groups facilitated by PRs in pairs
- Six focus groups (FG) took place between February and March 2021
 - First year FG N=6
 - Second year FG N=9
 - Third Year FG N=8
- FG were held on the online platform called Blackboard Collaborate. Participants were recruited via email through the School of Health Sciences.

Professions represented



RESULTS

- Twenty-three student participated in six FGs.
 - Seven males ♂
 - Eleven mature students
 - Four students had positive Covid diagnosis

Themes emerging to date:

Social-isolation
Anxiety
Financial-stress
Workload
Uncertainty-placement
Communication
Friendships

Biggest struggles identified by year group

First Year

- Lack of social interaction
- Managing multiple responsibilities
- Missing out on sporting competitions

Second Year

- Lack of social interaction
- Loss of motivation
- Managing workload and responsibilities

Final Year

- Lack of social interaction
- Negative impact on hobbies
- Managing multiple responsibility

Coping strategies

routine
running
exercise
outside
walking
dog-walking
mindfulness
volunteering
family-time
alone-time
cup-of-tea
grocery-shopping
envisioning-holiday
Virtual-study-group

CONCLUSION

The analysis of data is still ongoing however preliminary findings are highlighted here. The psychological impact on the future allied health and healthcare science workforce was highlighted. The health care workforce of Northern Ireland needs nurtured to ensure provision of services in future and mitigate against future risks.

This research highlighted:

- Future needs to support students in gaining clinical skills and confidence.
- Psychological support requirements for students and early career healthcare professionals.

Through peer research and analysis lead by peers the student voice is strong and amplifies the student experience.

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